



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Bronson Alcott Visits Mt. Pleasant

Among the guests whom William and Cordelia Throop Cole entertained in their parlor at Cedarcroft was Amos Bronson Alcott, the transcendentalist philosopher, author, and educator from New England. Like many writers and lec-

turers, Alcott visited communities in the West, but many of his lectures were "Conversations" with small groups gathered in a parlor, complete with cake and coffee.

Between 1870 and 1881, he visited Iowa, specifically Davenport, Dubuque, Fort Dodge, Iowa City, Muscatine, Burlington, Des Moines, Mt. Pleasant, Ames, and Cedar Rapids. He spoke on culture, character, religion, literature, liberal thought, and New En-

gland authors, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson, his friend and neighbor in Concord.

He was often introduced as Louisa May Alcott's father and asked to make a few remarks about the popular author. He did this gladly, writing home that he was "riding in Louisa's chariot, and adored as the grandfather of *Little Women*."

In November 1872, Louisa wrote in her diary: "Got Father off for the West, all neat and comfortable. I enjoyed every penny spent, and had a happy time packing his new trunk with warm flannels, neat shirts, gloves, etc., and seeing the dear man go off in a new suit. . . . We both laughed over the pathetic old times."

Having embraced New England liberal thought, Cordelia Throop Cole hosted Alcott in 1873, 1878, and 1881. Here is one of his letters to her.

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Read
Concord December
2nd 1875.

Dear Mrs Cole,

The good account, which you give concerning your social and intellectual recreations, tell well for Mount Pleasant. It is highly gratifying to learn that "the finely told history of *The Friends in Council*" proves so inspiring to your Reading and Conversational Clubs. I wish the *Sketch*

May

provoke the formation of similar associations throughout the West.

As to the Wisconsin gentleman about whose generosity you inquire - his proposition is to add \$500 to a like sum contributed by any town within his County. He has already established a library in his own place of residence. And I read - do I not - that Mrs Cole and Co are ready to bestow a like sum upon your proposed library.

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In a University town like yours a Free Library, accessible to the students, seems indispensable. Knowing what

yourself and friends have accomplished for the improvement of your townspeople, I cannot doubt of your success in this public matter.

It is but three years ago that Concord opened a Free Public library. A private citizen gave \$50,000 in a fine building, and now we have a library of 10,000 volumes. The school children are its best patrons, every family having access to the books.

I am passing pleasant days at home. Louisa is now in New York where she proposes passing the winter. Her health appears to be permanently restored. I think it possible that she may visit the West next spring. Mr. Emerson's new volume of Essays is to be published soon.

With happy memories of the many kind friends in your pleasant town,

I remain
Truly Yours,
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Mr. C. T. Cole.